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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AIRGRAM

POL 23.9 UVOLTA
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A-181 NO. | CONFIDENTIAL | HANDLING INDICATOR

TO : Department of State

INFO : Dept Please Pass OCAM Capitals, ACCRA, ADDIS ABABA, and LAGOS. PARIS.

FROM : Amembassy OUAGADOUGOU

DATE: February 26, 1966

SUBJECT : Upper Volta Coup

REF : A-170 ✓
POL 2 UVOLTA

Executive
EB

I. Summary

The January 3 coup in Upper Volta was the result of a labor led civil uprising which pushed the army into power. It succeeded because ex-President Yameogo's standing had been eroded by personal and political excesses, his party had become a shell, and the civil service was thoroughly disaffected.

The labor unions were one of the few independent organizations in the country. When they sunk their differences and called a general strike, popular dissatisfaction ignited into a political demonstration.

The military and police services protected Yameogo but found there was no support for him. Rather than continue to use force to maintain Yameogo, and perhaps split the army, the military accepted public demand they assume national leadership.

The coup was completed in one day. There were no serious injuries or deaths and no outside involvement. The new Government under Col. Lamizana replaced Yameogo's appointees and immediately began serious efforts to cope with the country's financial and economic problems.

GROUP 3
Downgraded at 12-year intervals,
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CONFIDENTIAL

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Drafted by: ECON:GRMartens:CHARGE:OWRobe ts:jtr:2/25/66
Contents and Classification Approved by: CHARGE

Clearances:

The Government continues to emphasize that it is transitional and will govern only until elections are held. Yameogo's fall and the collapse of his UDV/RDA party have, however, left a political vacuum. There are several new and old groups competing for future power. But Col. Lamizana seems increasingly determined not to step down until there is a single party or largely united front which can take over without dividing the country. As such a group is likely to be slow in forming, the Lamizana Government may well remain for six months or longer.

II. Background of the Coup d'Etat

The January 3 Coup d'Etat was largely spontaneous, arising from a long period of rising popular dissatisfaction with ex-President Yameogo. It was ignited by the country's three main labor federations submerging their differences and uniting in a general strike to protest an unpopular wage cut. The strike quickly became a political demonstration which overthrew Yameogo.

1. Yameogo's Loss of Support and Isolation.

Unlike many African leaders, President Yameogo did not come to power as the charasmatic symbol of his nation's struggle for independence. He became President instead after less than a year in Upper Volta's RDA party following an internal power fight in late 1958 upon the death of RDA founder Ouezzin-Coulibaly.

Yameogo's swift rise in power and his subsequent careful elimination of any opposition created many personal enemies. Fear of Yameogo in turn gradually eliminated constructive dialogue within the party or the Government. The President became increasingly isolated from the nation and in the moment of crisis was unable to gauge the situation and act effectively.

a. President Yameogo's Personal Spending.

President Yameogo spent a lot of money in a very poor country on himself and his family. This evoked increasing criticism in the light of the nation's obvious financial difficulties. The luxurious Presidential residence in Koudougou and Yameogo's lavish honeymoon trip to Brazil were supposedly paid for personally by the President. As Yameogo had no private income and these expenses were well above his salary, it was generally assumed that the money had been taken from the national treasury.

The unions fanned discontent on Presidential spending. It is widely reported that union members in Government offices made copies of Yameogo's family bills which were paid out of

official monies. The copies were then circulated from hand to hand. This stimulated continual talk of villas, automobiles, and Swiss bank accounts which hurt the President's popularity.

b. The President's Divorce and Remarriage.

The rumors of beatings, imprisonment and adultry connected with the President's divorce in October also hurt his national prestige. His prompt remarriage to a 22 year old girl scandalized members of the Catholic Church and much of the nation's elite. Many felt his conduct disgraced Upper Volta internationally.

c. Appointment of Strongarm Minister of Interior.

One of the ex-President's final mistakes was the reappointment in early December 1965 of Denis Yameogo, his elder cousin, [redacted] as Minister of Interior and Security. Denis Yameogo, apparently acting on his own, suppressed a union rally on December 31 with unnecessary harshness. This helped unite the unions and stir public discontent into action.

2. Weakness of UDV/RDA.

Upper Volta's single party, the UDV/RDA, was in theory a strong political organization like its Ivory Coast model, the PDCI. It never really became a functioning mass party for it did not draw the country's peasant population (95% of Upper Volta) into any meaningful political participation. Party sections were organized in 1959-1960 in each administrative Cercle and sub-sections were created in each village. These seem never to have developed and the countryside had no real role in national affairs. Party congresses were infrequent (the last was held in 1962) and served as sessions of praise for the President and his Ministers rather than as a national forum. Instead of constituting a base of Presidential power and a means of dialogue with the people, the Party had little purpose or practical existence. Most of it was ultimately absorbed into the Government.

3. [redacted] Elections.

Three elections--Presidential, Legislative and Municipal--were held late in 1965 in close succession. It was officially reported that respectively, 98, 97 and 79 percent of the voters participated and that, in every case, 99 percent plus voted for the unoposed UDV/RDA candidates.

Recent reports indicate that a far lower percentage actually voted (perhaps less than 30 percent in some areas) and that each Commandant of Cercle was given a percentage vote quota for his district. Several zealous Commandants listed 100 percent voting.

[redacted] these supposedly "free" elections probably further increased dissatisfaction with both the President and the Party. The officially reported abstention of 42 percent in the Ouagadougou municipal elections (in reality perhaps as high as 80 percent) was the first admitted indication of discontent.

4. The Trade Unions.

Upper Volta's three major and seven minor trade unions played a catalytic role in the coup d'etat. These unions group, at most, a third of the nation's 33,000 salary and wage earners. They have suffered from chronic disunity throughout their history.

The trade unions, however, were one of the very few organized groups in Upper Volta which managed to maintain any real independence. Yameogo tried to gain control over them in 1960 by emulating Houphouet-Boigny and creating a single national union under party discipline, the Union Nationale des Syndicats des Travailleurs de la Haute Volta (UNSTHV). This failed and the union movement became estranged from the Government. For the next five years, the Government discouraged and harassed the union movement, forbidding international affiliation, spying on meetings, and arresting union leaders.

By the end of 1965, the unions grouped the majority of the civil servants, teachers and health workers. These included many of the nation's elite. To a significant extent, it appears that the unions slowly eclipsed the party as a vehicle of political, social, and economic action, especially in the all important urban area.

The opposition between the President and the unionists was so complete that Yameogo flatly refused at the end of December to even meet with them and discuss the planned cut in salaries and family allowances. This triggered their decision to call a general strike which developed into a political demonstration and Yameogo's overthrow. It is doubtful if the unions could have succeeded in a coup d'etat by themselves. They succeeded because there was very general underlying dissatisfaction with the President which they ignited and converted into a coup.

5. Economic Stagnation.

Lack of economic progress may have been a further contributing factor to dissatisfaction with Yameogo. The country has very few natural resources. Economic development has been slow with little increase in real benefits for the average citizen. Per capita income has grown from about $40 in 1959 to an estimated $56 in 1965. Prices have meanwhile risen about 50-60 percent since 1959 and there has been almost no increase in salaries. It would not be surprising if many of the country's elite had serious doubts about the capacity of the Yameogo Government to promote economic development.

6. Civil Service Discouraged.

About 11,000 of Upper Volta's 33,000 salaried employees are civil servants (including teachers, hospital attendants, veterinarians). A large part of these, perhaps 50 percent, are in Ouagadougou. It appears from post-coup conversations that the civil service, particularly those in upper ministerial positions, had become thoroughly frustrated by Yameogo.

The ex-President had upset the service by promoting and demoting employees at will so that there was no job security. He undercut incentive by assuming responsibility for even routine administrative matters and disregarding procedures. Finally, he made everyone uncertain by monopolizing all policy matters and not publicizing his viewpoints or decisions, leaving them floundering as to their work. When the general strike was called, there was practically no one in the Government save the ministers who would actively support Yameogo. The strike was a hundred percent effective among government workers and many ranking civil servants were among the demonstrators.

III. Pre-Coup Events

There was no discernible increase in tension during the last few weeks of Yameogo's rule. Then, at the end of December, the Government mishandled a series of events in quick succession. One mistake built on another and the capital erupted. In retrospect, it seems that none of these need have resulted in a coup and that with a little more adroitness or compromise Yameogo could still be in power. But he had, it appears, [redacted] that he had lost touch with the realities of his country.

The annual congress of the Union Syndicale des Travailleurs Voltaique (USTV) met in Ouagadougou on December 27. The USTV, formerly the local GTAN branch, is the largest, and relatively most radical, labor federation in Upper Volta. It also includes the influential teachers union. The congress opened with a plea for an increased minimum wage and more social benefits. It was a regular session and was not oriented toward political action or a strike.

Union leaders, however, had already been informed by their comrades in the Treasury and National Assembly that President Yameogo was considering a 20% cut in civil service salaries and a reduction of family allowances from 1,500 to 700 francs. (These cuts were somewhat offset by cancellation of a ten percent tax, the impot cedulaire, levied on all government salaries.)

On December 28, the Government announced that President Yameogo had signed an accord on dual nationality during an Entente meeting in Abidjan. The accord had not been publicly discussed in Upper Volta

and its provisions were unknown. It was opposed by the unions who feared it would cut off the several hundred thousand Voltan workers in Ivory Coast from appealing to Upper Volta for protection of their rights.

The pending cut in salaries, and perhaps to some extent the dual nationality proposal, galvanized the unions into concerted effort. An Action Committee was formed on December 28 which included leaders of the three national and seven autonomous unions. The Committee was headed by Joseph Ouedraogo, a long time politician, Catholic trade unionist, and bitter rival of President Yameogo.

Attempts by the Committee to meet with the President on his return from Abidjan on December 30 were rebuffed. The next morning several unionists were summoned to the Ministry of the Interior

Late that afternoon, Yameogo delivered a New Year's Eve Budget message to the National Assembly. This speech contained a long, detailed list of foreign assistance projects in Upper Volta and ended with an abrupt conclusion that Voltans must do more to prove themselves worthy of this aid. He then announced the salary and family allowance cuts followed by a sharp warning that the unions would be "unmercifully crushed" should they attempt to oppose these measures. The recorded broadcast of the speech was later interrupted surreptitiously several times by employees of the broadcasting station.

The National Assembly, which had become a Presidential rubber stamp, approved the 1966 Budget a few hours after the President's address. Aroused by passage of the salary cut and by the President's continued refusal to meet with the unions, the Action Committee and several hundred supporters met at the labor hall during the evening. The anti-government tenor of the meeting attracted the attention of Denis Yameogo. Backed by elements of Republican Guard, which are controlled by the Ministry of Interior, he broke up the meeting with the help of tear gas. The unionists fled, but 20-30 were arrested and their leaders went into hiding.

Next morning, January 1, the Action Committee issued a call for a general strike on January 3. The Government responded by declaring a state of emergency and imposing a 10 pm to 6 pm curfew. All roads leading out of the capital were blocked. Police guards appeared at the labor hall, power station, post office and radio station. Yameogo spoke on the radio, declaring the general strike illegal and stating that the "union comedy" was finished.

On Sunday, January 2, armored cars and armed troops were posted around the Presidential Palace. Soldiers continued to patrol the town. Unionists nonetheless appeared at the market area in the center of town urging solidarity for the strike. Several arrests were observed. During a noon broadcast, Yameogo tried to blame foreign

involvement for the purely internal crisis by accusing ... tion Committee leader Joseph Ouedraogo of being a tool of Ghana and Communist China. The accusation was not believed and only served to harden union opposition to the President.

It now appears after the event that the union leaders had decided before January 3 to turn the general strike into an attempt to overthrow Yameogo. The timing is hard to fix and it may have been an evolving determination rather than a single decision. Undoubtedly, some of the union leaders and their sympathizers wished to overthrow Yameogo from the beginning. The intransigence of the President and the implications of the genral strike, once preparations were underway, probably convinced others that it should become a political demonstration. It now seems that the idea of asking the army to take power was fairly widespread late Sunday, January 2. Several dozen small placards demanding economic justice and assumption of power by the army were made that evening.

IV. January 3: The Coup d'Etat

By Monday morning, January 3, tension was high in Ouagadougou. Armed guards were posted in the center of town and troops and armored cars ringed the Presidential Palace. A 7:30 am check on the Government administrative buildings and commercial establishments showed that the general strike was 100% successful. A short time later, strikers and demonstrators began gathering at the Place d'Arms near the center of town.

The 8 am Government radio broadcast reported that the strike had failed and that 75 percent of the workers were on duty. Moments later, a crowd estimated at some 3-4,000 left the Place d'Arms and headed toward the Presidential Palace about a mile away. The radio then went off the air after a portion of the crowd chased the announcer from his office. (He managed to escape into the Palais de l'Entente a short distance away.)

The marchers contained a wide cross section of Ouagadougou's population ranging from teachers, union members, government officials and students to small farmers and street urchins. Several dozen signs demanded "Bread", "Army to Power" and "The Army of the People for the People". After a few feeble attempts to contain the marchers in the downtown area, the military fell back to the Palace.

Shouting "Army to Power", the crowd reached the Palace gates but was pushed back some 200 yards by gendarmerie units using tear gas grenades. As the morning wore on, the crowd grew to perhaps 5-6,000 and surrounded the Palace grounds (about two city blocks). They grew increasingly excited but never attacked the army and gendarmerie units. The later in turn used tear gas and rifle butts sparingly. Both sides apparently wished to avoid serious violence. Military cars and

vehicles, one even with an open load of tear gas grenades, moved freely through the demonstrators without being molested. Members of the crowd, especially the women, constantly urged soldiers to "join their relatives and friends".

About 11 am word was passed to the marchers to return to town. Many by now had armed themselves with clubs and were shouting "Death to Yameogo" and "Yameogo Assassin" as they withdrew to the Place d'Arms. En route, they pushed through troops guarding the National Assembly and partially sacked it. They smashed windows of several cars belonging to deputies and helped themselves to bar supplies in the Assembly lounge. The new RDA Maison du Parti was also attacked but the sole damage was removal of Houphouet Boigny's name from the dedication on the facade.

The crowd then reassembled in front of the army camp at the Place d'Arms and spent the remainder of the day listening to speeches by minor labor leaders and chanting "Army to Power". In the late afternoon, unionists set up a loudspeaker system on the back of a truck.

Upper Volta's Chief of Staff, Lt. Col. Sangoule Lamizana, a capable non-political soldier, became the focus of public demand for army support. Early in the morning of January 3, a crowd had gathered in front of his house and begged him to assume power. He reportedly told them that he was not yet ready to act and urged them to present their grievances to the President.

Colonel Lamizana met with Yameogo continually through the day and apparently convinced him to rescind the unpopular salary and family allowance cuts late in the afternoon. He was authorized to announce their cancellation to the crowd about 5 pm but apparently doubted privately whether this was not too late even as he did so. The crowd and their leaders were in fact by then fully committed to Yameogo's overthrow and would not disperse. The Colonel still declined to accept power and repeated his by then familiar statement that "the army will meet its responsibilities."

Returning to the Palace, Colonel Lamizana informed the President that he could no longer guarantee order. Yameogo, who had been intransigent all day, reportedly shrugged his shoulders and gave in at about 6 pm. The crowd meanwhile remained outside the army camp and lit fires for an all-night watch. After Yameogo dictated a resignation statement, Col. Lamizana returned to the Place d'Arms and announced he had taken power in the name of the army. The crowd cheered but refused to disperse. They were apparently not convinced that the coup had occurred and feared that Lamizana might be dissembling in order to protect Yameogo.

About 10 pm, the radio broadcasted the long, rambling farewell message by President Yameogo. He gave the impression that he was stepping

down willingly but that he was ready to come back if there was any call for his services. This excited the fears of the demonstrators that Yameogo had not really resigned and several thousand remained all night at the Place d'Arms.

Next morning, the crowd grew much larger and became more threatening. There was general fear of a double cross by the army. At 9 am, the principal trade union leaders headed by Joseph Ouedraogo appeared dramatically before the assembly. In a short speech to the wildly cheering crowd, Ouedraogo promised to obtain immediately Yameogo's written resignation. He then left for the Palace followed by a large part of the demonstrators. The rest of the crowd appeared satisfied for the first time and began to disperse in response to appeals by union leaders. Shops and government offices reopened in the afternoon and the coup was over.

When Ouedraogo and his supporters arrived at the Palace, Yameogo had disappeared. He reportedly had left by car under guard for exile in the late evening or early morning of January 3-4. Instead of continuing on to the Ivory Coast, however, he stopped at Koudougou, his birthplace, about 75 miles west of Ouagadougou. He apparently still thought he could return to power and wished to stay near by. He was subsequently brought back to Ouagadougou and has remained under guard at the army camp.

V. Coup Aftermath.

The union and demonstration leaders apparently spent much of January 4 negotiating with Col. Lamizana on the composition of the new Government and its first steps. The Action Committee had prepared a list of requests which included: Yameogo's arrest; house detention of his ministers and the Presidents of the National Assembly, Supreme court, State Security Court and Economic and Social Council; closing of the airport; liberation of jailed unionists; appointment of a national committee to uncover the thefts of the old regime; abolition of the 1966 budget; and the dissolution of the National Assembly and the Municipal Councils. Avoidance of foreign interference and the maintenance of democratic liberties was also stressed.

The Action Committee's proposals were not formally acknowledged but in the following weeks most of them were adopted. The Lamizana Government did not, however, arrest or charge Yameogo for misuse of government funds. It apparently did not want to expose past failings and did not set up an investigating committee. After a short period, Lamizana also released the ministers who had been under house arrest and allowed several to return to government service.

On January 5, apparently acting in concert with union and demonstration leaders, Col. Lamizana announced the suspension of the constitution and dissolution of the National Assembly. He also convoked

the diplomatic corps and formally repeated his January 3 assurances that there would be no change in foreign policy, that all international committments would be respected, and that Upper Volta would continue its membership in the Entente, OCAM, OAU, and UN.

A new Government consisting of seven military and five civilians was announced January 8. The next day, Col. Lamizana addressed the nation. He explained that he had not wished to take power but had been forced to do so by circumstances. Admitting the poor financial condition of the country, he stressed the necessity of national unity and of economic development with the help of external assistance. A general rotation of the commandants of administrative districts followed. Several former ministers were appointed commandants and a number of existing commandants with close ties with the old regime were shifted to obscure posts.

On January 28, the Government dissolved all municipal councils. These had been elected in December 1965 on single, unopposed UDV/RDA lists. Special interim administrative delegations were then appointed for each town or city. On February 1, the Government created a Consultative Committee of 10 military and 31 civilians. Included among the civilians were the five principal local labor leaders. The Committee is to advise the Government and apparently will serve as a substitute National Assembly until elections can be held.

The Consultative Committee seems likely to eclipse the trade union's Action Committee in terms of formal relations with the Government. The Action Committee itself was enlarged late in January but its membership was restricted exclusively to union leaders. It now will most likely devote its time to maintaining union solidarity and strength. Most local unionists disclaim political aspirations but are determined to preserve their effectiveness as a pressure group to ensure satisfaction of labor interests.

VI. Effects of the Coup

1. Internal.

The collapse of Maurice Yameogo and his personally directed UDV/RDA party have left a political vacuum in Upper Volta. The only groups remaining with any degree of organization are the Army and the trade unions. While Col. Lamizana has repeatedly maintained that he hopes to pass the mantle of government to the civilians as soon as it is practical, there is in fact no individual or group who can clearly claim to represent the country. Trade unionists, with the exception of Joseph Ouedraogo, have not entered the political arena for fear of diluting and destroying the union movement in political struggles. They could wield a lot of influence on new political groupings but would seem unlikely to have any hold on the great mass of the country's village farmers.

The promise of elections has brought much of Upper Volta's long dormant political opposition back into action. An attempt to resuscitate the UDV/RDA and restore it to its "pre Maurice Yameogo purity" is currently being made by Joseph Ouedraogo, with the help of Darsalam Diallo, who rallied to the RDA only in 1960. Should Ouedraogo be successful in establishing himself as leader of a purged RDA, he would be a major contender for future leadership of the country. At best, however, the RDA has probably only a skeletal organization.

Another old time politician, Nazi Boni, has recently returned from five years voluntary exile in Dakar. He is attempting to regain his old power base and has issued at least one political tract condemning the revival of a reformed RDA. As Boni's support was always regional and tribal (Bobo-Dioulasso - Dedougou area in the west) and his main program was Upper Volta's adherence to the defunct Mali Federation, it is doubtful that he can make much of a come back even with a national, modernized program.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Upper Volta's leading intellectual, is apparently making a bid for power with his National Liberation Movement, a party he helped found in 1958 at Dakar. The MLN has remained underground or dormant since 1960. It seems to have the support of the teachers, youth, intellectuals, and many unionists. These, however, constitute only a very small part of the country's population. Ki-Zerbo's apparent lack of mass support puts him at a disadvantage in competing on the national level.

The timing of the next elections is very uncertain. Col. Lamizana now appears in no hurry to pass the Government over to quarreling political factions. A recent editorial appearing in Upper Volta's only real newspaper, the semi-governmental Carrefour Africain, called for the formation of a single party which could maintain national unity, hold a real dialogue with the people, and act as an expression of the popular will. It appears likely that the Lamizana Government will delay elections until the politicians can reach some consensus, which may take six months or longer.

2. External.

Old suspicions and hostility toward the Ivory Coast seemed to be revived by the coup d'etat. On December 28, the trade unions' Action Committee called for a review of the accord on dual nationality. During the coup, the crowd ripped Houphouet Boigny's name from the Maison du Parti. Throughout the events, resentment was heard by Embassy officers concerning Upper Volta's position as a vassal state vis a vis Ivory Coast.

While Upper Volta will probably try to exercise greater formal independence in its relations with the Ivory Coast, its position in the Entente and its close cooperation with Ivory Coast should remain unchanged. Houhpouet Boigny encouraged such developments when he made some immediate commercial concessions to Upper Volta on

February 21 by guaranteeing to import a wide range of Voltan goods. Changes in Upper Volta's relations with other African states are unlikely and the Lamizana Government will probably remain moderate and pro-West. The Government is maintaining its special relationship with France and seems to have won French support.

Owen W. Roberts
Charge d'Affaires ad interim